



Portfolio

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

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SOUTH KOREA





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Childhood and lifestyles

As I grow older, I realise the crucial role that timing plays in our lives. I am a firm believer that events happening at a specific moment in my life, might not have held that much significance if they happened at another period of time, and I was only able to realise this during the past year, where my life took a drastic change and I was able to discover new things about life and people that I never thought I would in the near future, but most importantly, I was able to discover who I truly am, and all of that thanks to my international experiences.

My name is Nour, I am a 20 years old Moroccan women, who recently started her journey of adulthood, but before getting into that, let's start with my childhood

Growing up in Morocco, means growing in a very diverse environment for most cases. For my experience, I grew up in a household where we were all a hundred percent Moroccan, but where we spoke Arabic, French, and English on a daily basis, often even mixing the three languages in the same sentence. I was exposed to other cultures other than the Moroccan one from a very young age, and my interest in discovering the world grew even more after I started watching shows and reading books in languages that were not in my mother tongue, which allowed me to grow more curious about what is out there and what the world could offer.

During my teenage years, I studied in a private school where I had a lot of teachers coming from France, and I remember one quote that my 5th grade teacher always told us, which in English translates to: "The world is a book, and those who do not travel have only read one page". As an avid reader and book lover ever since I was a child, this quote stuck by me and made me realise that the world has so much to offer to those who seek adventure and new experiences, and this was only further proven to me in university, where I had teachers from all around the world and classmates of diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds.

It was in my third year of university that my international experiences really started, more precisely on September 2023, where I got selected by our school's program manager, along with 3 other students from my year, to participate in an international business plan competition with the Solbridge University of Daejeon, in South Korea. The competition had 2 rounds, The initial one where more than twenty teams from all around the world competed virtually for a week to get selected to the final round, which will be held in South Korea, and where only eight teams will be able to participate. A week of hard working, day and night to come up and realise the best business

plan to a subject that was new to us which was the Wellness tourism sector in south korea, but a very rewarding price, as I wake up randomly, one week after our virtual presentation to the jury, to realise that my team had been selected to participate in the final round in january, in daejeon, and that all expenses will be taken in charge of by my university.

And that is where the adventure begins

South Korea Competition:

The trip to south korea itself was long and tiring with around 20 hours of flying, but the excitement of the week ahead was more thrilling than any tiredness or fatigue we could feel, I have been a fan of the korean culture and history ever since I discovered Kpop and Kdramas when I was fourteen, and if you were to tell teenager me, that I would be setting foot in korea for a whole week at twenty years old, she would honestly laugh in your face. Going to korea was like a dream come true, upon arriving and seeing the people and hearing the language, I was already transported into another universe where I was a main character in a korean tv show, the only difference is that it was real and not fictional, which made the experience ten times better. We arrived at 1 in the morning and were welcomed by a team of warm students who assigned us our rooms and I was so excited that night that I could barely sleep. Both Moroccan and Korean cultures place a high value on hospitality and respect for guests, so when I was warmly welcomed by the Korean hosts, who went out of their way to ensure we were comfortable and well-accommodated it reminded me of the Moroccan tradition of treating guests with a lot care and generosity.

The following morning was where the final round started, we were picked up from our dorms and driven to the university where all teams attended a conference, and where the dean welcomed us and explained to us the program of the week, we got to meet the different teams with whom we have forged great memories and unbreakable bonds, and each team was assigned a study room to work throughout the week.

Thanks to the school's very organized program for the week, everyday was a perfect mix of work and fun; we had slots to work and concentrate on the competition, but also a lot of activities to discover the city and bond with other teams, which not only helped me learn more about the korean culture, but I was also able to learn about the other teams cultures and habits, and with time, I realised that this experience was not just about the competition itself but also about

understanding and appreciating the diverse ways of living and thinking that each culture brought to the table. The more time passed and we got to know the other teams better, the more I realised that each team brought their unique perspectives and approaches to the competition. For instance, the Indonesian and Thai teams exhibited a strong sense of teamwork and community and fun. Their collaborative spirit and the way they supported each other were reminiscent of the communal values I was familiar with in Morocco, in addition to the bubbly and vibrant personality that they had which made the experience way more enjoyable. On the other hand, the Spanish team was more serious and focused on work. Their approach was disciplined and focused more on planning and execution, which added a different dynamic to the competition, contrasting with the more relaxed and spontaneous approaches of other teams. Another example would be the Indian team who showcased a deep respect for knowledge and learning. Their research and analytical skills were very impressive, and they approached the challenges with a methodical and disciplined mindset. This contrasted with the more fluid and intuitive approaches I had observed in other teams, including my own.

Interacting with such a diverse group of people required a lot of adaptability and open-mindedness, and it was fascinating to see how cultural backgrounds influenced our decision-making processes, communication styles, and problem-solving techniques.

This week in South Korea profoundly shaped who I am today, thanks to the incredible people I met and the lasting friendships I formed. I still keep in touch with many of them, and their diverse perspectives continue to enrich my life to this day. Even though my team didn't win the first prize, we were thrilled to receive the introductory video prize. However, I believe that the most rewarding gift was the week itself, filled with unforgettable experiences and invaluable lessons that I carry with me every day.

Roman Exchange- Italy 2024

Two weeks after coming back from South Korea, I boarded a plane with my best friend to embark on our exchange semester journey, which started in February 2024. Italy has always been a dream to me, but just last year, I would have never considered the option of studying there because it is very expensive. The original plan for my exchange was to do it in Istanbul, Turkey, and it has been the plan from my very first year of university and I got accepted in a really nice school and was

very excited about it, but a few months before the start of the exchange, I received the opportunity to apply to a program called ERASMUS+, where in case of acceptance, all charges of the exchange in specific countries, would be taken in charge of by the organization and my family would not have to pay anything. After applying to three schools in Europe, 2 in Spain and one in Italy, I received, one week later, an email saying that I am eligible for the program and that I had been accepted to study in UNINT university of Rome, with a scholarship and a study grant, which honestly felt unreal to me. And that is how my journey to Italy started. The Eternal City, with its timeless charm and bustling life, became my home away from home. This journey wasn't just about exploring a new place; it was a voyage into the depths of history, culture, and self-discovery.

Arriving in Rome felt like stepping into a living museum. Every corner of the city seemed to whisper stories from the past. Every historical monument and every corner of the city seemed to tell a story, from the grandeur of the Colosseum, the intricate beauty of the Sistine Chapel, and the serene majesty of the Trevi Fountain, Rome left me in a state of perpetual awe. Yet, amidst this splendor, I felt a bit overwhelmed. The city's vastness and the unfamiliarity of the Italian language made me question myself and whether I was up to living alone in such a different environment. However, this initial discomfort laid the groundwork for my growth and self-development.

Adjusting to living away from my parents and managing everything on my own was one of the most challenging yet rewarding aspects of my exchange semester in Rome. Back home, I was used to having a lot of support. My parents were always there to help with cooking, cleaning, groceries, and running errands. Moving to a new country and having to handle all these responsibilities by myself was a stark contrast to the life I was used to.

In the beginning, the volume of tasks that needed my attention was overwhelming, and cooking was particularly daunting. I went from having home-cooked meals prepared by my family to staring at unfamiliar ingredients in an Italian supermarket, unsure of how to piece together a decent meal. My first few attempts were honestly laughable—burnt pasta, undercooked vegetables, and a lot of trial and error. But gradually, I learned. I started watching cooking tutorials online, asking my local friends for tips, and experimenting with simple recipes. It was a steep learning curve, but with each successful dish, I gained confidence and a sense of accomplishment and actually discovered that I love cooking and baking, and it just needs patience and practice.

Cleaning and maintaining my living space was another challenge. At home, chores were often shared, and sometimes, I didn't even have to think about them. In Rome, it was entirely up to me

and my roommates to ensure the apartment was livable. I had to schedule my time efficiently to keep up with my studies, social life, and the myriad of household tasks. This included everything from laundry to taking out the trash, and it often felt like there weren't enough hours in the day. However, we soon developed a routine that balanced all these responsibilities, which made the process smoother and less stressful.

Doing groceries and running errands were activities I had previously taken for granted. Navigating an Italian grocery store was initially confusing, with products labeled in a language I was still learning and unfamiliar brands lining the shelves. I had to figure out what to buy, how to budget my money, and plan meals for the week. Running errands required me to interact with locals and practice my Italian, which was intimidating at first but necessary, and I got used to it with time.

Despite the initial difficulties, this independence was an incredibly important lesson in my life. Being responsible for myself taught me a great deal about time management, budgeting, and prioritizing tasks. I learned to plan ahead, anticipate my needs, and adapt to unforeseen circumstances. These are skills that go beyond day-to-day survival and are essential in every aspect of life. Moreover, this experience helped me mature in ways I hadn't anticipated. I gained a deeper appreciation for the efforts my parents put into managing a household and the challenges of balancing multiple responsibilities. It also made me more empathetic towards others in similar situations, understanding the stress and effort involved in maintaining independence.

Living on my own in a foreign country also pushed me to be more self-reliant and confident in my abilities. There was a significant sense of pride in knowing that I could handle the demands of daily life without depending on anyone else.

One of the most enriching aspects of my semester was the diverse group of people I met. My fellow exchange students came from a wide array of backgrounds, each bringing their own unique perspective and broadening my understanding of the world. We hailed from places like France, Albania, Spain, Canada, USA, Greece, etc...which made our interactions all the more fascinating. One of the highlights of my exchange semester was the opportunity to explore Italy. From the romantic canals of Venice and the charming streets of Verona to the rugged coastline of Cinque Terre, each destination had its own unique charm. I was left spellbound by Florence's art scene and found tranquility at Lake Como, which provided a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of city life. I also visited Pisa and Naples, each offering its own distinct flavor of Italian culture.

However, these travels weren't without their challenges. Navigating public transportation, dealing with language barriers, and managing a tight budget required resourcefulness and adaptability.

One of my favorite discoveries was Bracciano, a small medieval village not far from Rome. With its large lake perfect for swimming and its serene, peaceful atmosphere, Bracciano quickly became my favorite place in Italy. It offered a contrast to the bustling cities I visited, providing a sense of calm and belonging that I hadn't felt elsewhere. I instantly fell in love with its tranquility and the slow-paced lifestyle it promoted. I often recommend Bracciano to everyone I know, as it's a hidden gem that embodies the essence of peace and serenity.

My time in Bracciano made me realize my preference for a slower-paced life over the fast-paced city life. The peacefulness of the village and the simple joy of swimming in the lake made me feel at home, and I could easily envision myself living there in the future. This realization has been one of the most profound lessons from my semester abroad, highlighting the importance of finding a lifestyle that truly resonates with my inner self.

As I sit here at the airport, waiting to board my flight back home, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey I've had over the past few months. My exchange semester in Rome has been a transformative experience, shaping who I am in profound ways. The international experiences, the friendships forged, and the lessons learned have all contributed to my growth.

When I left Morocco, I was filled with anticipation and a bit of uncertainty about what lay ahead. Now, as I prepare to return, I can proudly say that the person boarding this plane is entirely different from the one who arrived in Rome in February. Living independently, exploring the beautiful landscapes of Italy, and immersing myself in a new culture have all taught me invaluable life skills and given me a deeper understanding of myself and the world.

Returning to my life in Morocco will undoubtedly be an adjustment. The rhythms and routines of home will feel different after the vibrant experiences of my time abroad. However, I carry with me happy tears in my eyes, not of sadness but of gratitude and joy for the memories made and the lessons learned. Rome and the people I met there will always hold a special place in my heart, and the impact of this journey will continue to shape my future in ways I can only begin to imagine.